

Current Management Direction

Authorities

The following legislation and policies address the management of special-status species in the park: the National Park Service Organic Act, the Endangered Species Act; the National Environmental Quality Act (NEPA); the California Endangered Species Act; the Migratory Bird Conservation Act; the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act; the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; and the Wilderness Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) normally takes the lead departmental responsibility of coordinating and implementing provisions of the Federal Endangered Species Act for all listed endangered, threatened, and candidate species. This Biological Assessment is prepared in accordance with Section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, as part of the consultation process with the USFWS.

Policy and Program Objectives

The following National Park Service policies and program objectives prescribe the management of special-status species:

- National Park Service *Management Policies* (1988a) states:

“Consistent with the purposes of the Endangered Species Act (16 USC 1531 et seq.), the National Park Service will identify and promote the conservation of all Federally listed threatened, endangered, or candidate species within park boundaries and their critical habitats.”

“The National Park Service also will identify all state and locally listed state threatened, endangered, rare, declining, sensitive, or candidate species that are native to and present in the parks, and their critical habitats. These species and their critical habitats will be considered in National Park Service planning activities.”
- The 1980 *General Management Plan for Yosemite* states:

“Protect threatened and endangered plant and animal species and reintroduce, where practical, those species eliminated from the natural ecosystems.”

- The *Natural Resources Management Guideline- NPS-77(1991b)* states:

“Management affects the distribution, abundance, and ecological relationships of and among species. Whereas preservation can be accomplished by a zoo, botanical garden, or other non-natural refugium, the National Park Service’s goal is the long-term preservation of species and their ecological role and function as part of a “natural ecosystem.” It is, therefore, critical that ecological aspects of management prevail in dealing with threatened and endangered species. An understanding of factors limiting the distribution and abundance of the species of concern must be well understood and incorporated into any management action.”
- Federal and state laws, Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR), and park-specific regulations based on the authority of 36 CFR (i.e., the Superintendent’s Compendium) serve to protect sensitive resources and address user capacities. These regulations include the ability to close specific areas to protect resources and address fishing, wildlife, or plant collection, camping, sanitation and refuse, stock use, boating, swimming, bathing, noise, and commercial operations. An example of how the regulations have been applied to protect sensitive habitat is the closure of Cathedral Beach as a commercial raft removal point, which was closed to protect the river bank.
- User capacities in designated Wilderness would be addressed through the existing overnight trailhead quota system and limits on group size and number of stock allowed. This system was developed with the goal of protecting resources, and continued monitoring of resource conditions allows for modification of the quotas.
- Areas within and adjacent to the river corridor that have been restored or rehabilitated may be closed under the authority of the Superintendent’s Compendium. Examples include closure of some highly used “social” trails that impact meadow and riparian communities.
- There are existing limitations to non-motorized boating. For instance, in 1996 limitations on commercial rafting were implemented in Yosemite Valley to enhance the visual quality of the river corridor. These limitations on the number of commercial raft rentals allowed and on the hours of use for rafts would continue and may be modified as necessary.
- Ongoing efforts to educate the public about river-related issues, through interpretive programs and ranger contacts, would continue and may be modified as necessary.

Desired Conditions

The *Vegetation Management Plan* for Yosemite (1997g) defines desired conditions for major terrestrial plant communities. The desired conditions for plant communities that occur within the river corridor are summarized in table II-1.

Table II-1
Desired Conditions for Relevant Plant Communities

Plant Community (Moore 1992)	Desired Conditions (NPS 1977g)	Planning Area
Subalpine Coniferous Forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perpetuate communities of generally pure stands, with sparse understory and fuel accumulation Allow ecological processes, such as fire and native insects, to continue unimpeded 	Upper main stem Merced River, upper South Fork Merced River
Upper Montane Coniferous Forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain natural species diversity within an acceptable range of variation In drier area, restore processes to favor species and communities common under frequent, light surface fires In developed area, maintain a safe visitor environment Maintain generally uneven-aged stands, with highly variable community structure, and light to moderate accumulations of fuel 	Upper main stem Merced River, upper South Fork Merced River
Lower Montane Coniferous Forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restore processes that favor fire adapted species Maintain natural species diversity and forest structure within an acceptable range of variation In developed areas, maintain a safe visitor environment Maintain uneven-aged stands, with generally sparse to light understories Maintain fuel loads that range from sparse to generally light Maintain spatial variety of forest structure Allow natural processes including native insects and diseases to operate essentially unimpeded. Monitor non-native insects, diseases, and air pollution forest impacts 	Yosemite Valley, Wawona
California Black Oak Woodland and Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In those communities that have been used for traditional practices by Native Americans, maintain the dominance of valued species (such as black oak) through the localized exclusion of conifers and understory growth Maintain natural species diversity within an acceptable range of variation Maintain variability that includes both woodland (open canopy) and forest (closed canopy) In developed areas, maintain a safe visitor environment Maintain variability that includes both pure and mixed stands Maintain the culturally significant elements of the landscape 	Yosemite Valley, Wawona
Interior Live Oak Woodland and Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain mixed stands dominated by broadleaved species Maintain species diversity within an acceptable range of variation In developed areas, maintain a safe visitor environment 	El Portal, lower South Fork Merced River
White Alder Riparian Woodland and Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain mixed stands dominated by broadleaved species Maintain species diversity within an acceptable range of variation 	Yosemite Valley, El Portal, Wawona
Canyon Live Oak Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain pure or almost pure stands with generally little understory Maintain natural species diversity within an acceptable range of variation In developed areas, maintain a safe visitor environment 	Yosemite Valley, El Portal, Wawona

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Desired Conditions for Relevant Plant Communities

Plant Community (Moore 1992)	Desired Conditions (NPS 1977g)	Planning Area
Cismontane Upland Woodlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain widely spaced shrubs and trees, with open canopy and as light a ground fuel layer as possible, where open savannah is the normal condition • Preserve native species composition, to the maximum extent possible • In developed areas, maintain a safe visitor environment 	El Portal
Northern Mixed Chaparral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a low proportion of decadent brush • Maintain a mosaic of age classes that serves to form natural fuel breaks and preserve species diversity • Maintain natural species diversity within an acceptable range of variation 	El Portal, South Fork Merced River
Interior Live Oak Chaparral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain mixed to pure stands generally dominated by interior live oak with variability that ranges from early successional stages to those of closed canopies, perpetual leaf litter, and no understory 	El Portal
Grassland, Meadow, and Other Herbaceous Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain wet meadows with water tables that remain at or near the surface throughout the year, preserving assemblages with native species – generally sedges – predominating • Restore, where feasible, wet meadow conditions in those sites where humans have intervened • Restore and maintain meadow systems, with human-induced conifer invasion held in check (or a dynamic maintained) • Maintain natural species composition within the acceptable range of variability 	Upper main stem Merced River, Yosemite Valley, El Portal, South Fork Merced River